

Managerial coaching: A formal process or a daily conversation?

Angie Dixey, Blagdon Hill, Taunton, UK.

Contact: angie@angiedixey.co.uk

Abstract

Research indicates that the frequency and effectiveness of managerial coaching is failing to meet organisational demands. For companies to leverage the potential benefits a coaching based approach can offer, in terms of performance and employee engagement, it is critical to advance our understanding of managerial coaching such that any potential discrepancy is reduced. Using a phenomenological approach, this study explores how six sales managers experience their role of coach. The most significant discovery was that participants are actively coaching, just not necessarily in a way organisations are expecting or potentially measuring. Rather than follow a formalised process, participants prefer a conversational approach, with the activity conceivably going unnoticed.

Keywords: managerial coaching, leadership, sales manager, conversational coaching, coaching style

Introduction

Managers are increasingly required to perform the role of coach as a strategy for increasing organisational performance and employee engagement. Findings from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD, 2011) supported this trend when it sampled 600 UK organisations and found more than two thirds reporting line managers having the main responsibility for delivering coaching and only 1% reporting managers having no responsibility (CIPD, 2011).

Adopting a coaching style of leadership typically improves business results and develops talent (Hunt & Weintraub, 2002), so this aspect of a manager's role certainly appeals logically. Furthermore, a vast array of practitioner literature advocates managerial coaching as a beneficial activity for organisations (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2005; Ellinger, Beattie, & Hamlin, 2010; Zeus & Skiffington, 2000). However, as organisations continue to demand this activity from their managers, whether this is happening in practice is coming under scrutiny (Clutterbuck, 2012; Hunt & Weintraub, 2011) and research indicates it is happening neither as frequently or effectively as organisations would perhaps desire (CIPD, 2013; Gilley, Gilley, & Kouider, 2010). If organisations are to fully leverage the potential effectiveness a coaching based management approach can offer, it is critical for us to advance our understanding of managerial coaching to help avoid this apparent discrepancy from increasing. So what could be creating this discrepancy? If recent research is correct why, when requested to act as coach, do managers apparently fall short?

Coaching is certainly not a new phenomenon in context of leadership, with much of the latter part of the 20th century dominated by theories focussed on how more democratic, supportive, coaching based approaches can help increase organisational performance (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 2008; Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939; McGregor, 1989; Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1973). Some twenty five years ago Evered & Selman (1989) advocated a shift in management paradigm away from one of command and control, to one focused more on empowerment and collaboration, emphasising how a

coaching approach can improve the effectiveness of both the leader and the wider organisation. Indeed, the positive relationship between a coaching based style of leadership and overall leadership effectiveness continues to be identified and supported through empirical research (Hagen & Aguilar, 2012; Hamlin, Ellinger, & Beattie, 2006; Manz & Sims, 1987), a view supported by Hicks & McCracken (2010, p. 72) who go so far as to say “coaching and leadership are two sides of the same coin”. However, there appears a lack of clarity within the extant literature as to what managerial coaching is (Bond & Seneque, 2013; Joo, Sushko, & McLean, 2012) and potential ambiguity as to what organisations are demanding of their managers (Bresser, 2011). These factors could be creating confusion amongst managers, possibly contributing to poor adoption of managerial coaching; huge variances in approach; and questionable quality (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2005; ILM, 2011).

In practice, managerial coaching appears to represent a continuum of activities (Grant & Hartley, 2013) ranging from formal, structured coaching sessions (akin to those provided by external coaches), through to more informal, daily interactions where a manager adopts a leadership approach based on coaching principles. Whether managers have the necessary time to perform the more formalised, structured activity has certainly come under question (Clutterbuck, 2012; Matthews, 2010; O'Connor & Lages, 2004;) which, together with concerns around power and confidentiality issues (Ferrari, 2006), results in an apparent preference amongst both practitioners and researchers alike towards the more informal end of the continuum. At this end, managerial coaching could be defined as simply a “style of management, integrated within a move from a command and control approach to a more participative style of management” (Anderson, Rayner, & Schyns, 2009, p. ix), although the challenge here is whether a manager’s actions are interpreted by themselves, or others, as coaching and thereby measured as such.

The majority of information concerning managerial coaching is supplied by practitioner texts (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2005; Ellinger, *et al.*, 2010; Zeus & Skiffington, 2000), with a comparable lack of empirical research that supports the theory in practice. However, this body of research is starting to expand, highlighting the skills and behaviours which predict effective managerial coaching including good motivation and communication skills, (Gilley *et al.*, 2010); empowering employees to make their own decisions (David & Matu 2013); emotional intelligence and self-awareness in the manager (Ladyshevsky, 2009); and a belief in an individual’s ability to change (Heslin, Vandewalle, & Latham, 2006). Studies have also identified the negative impact an autocratic, dictatorial management style can have on effective managerial coaching (Ellinger, Hamlin, & Beattie, 2008); the need for managers to be equipped sufficiently to deal with potential barriers (Clutterbuck & Megginson 2005; Grant 2010); and the importance of supporting managers in making the necessary shift in managerial mind-set (Misiukonis, 2011).

For the most part, research in this area has favoured a quantitative approach, with many studies drawing from practitioner texts to construct measures to assess behaviours surrounding managerial coaching (David & Matu 2013; Gilley *et al.*, 2010; Heslin *et al.*, 2006). Research participants have typically been either recipients of coaching or those responsible for sponsoring and adopting managerial coaching within organisations. Notwithstanding the value these studies have provided in generating empirical evidence to support views held in practitioner literature, when combined with an emphasis on quantitative approaches the potential exists for us to perhaps make too many assumptions about which variables to measure. What appears to be lacking is the voice of the managers themselves – a perspective which may offer richer insights into why managers are not apparently coaching in a way that fully meets organisational expectations.

In an attempt to address this gap in the research, the aim of this study was to develop our understanding of how managers actually experience their role of coach by adopting a more open and flexible qualitative approach, such as that favoured by Ladyshevsky (2009) and Misiukonis (2011). The next section details the research methodology adopted for the study, followed by an exploration

and discussion of one of the key superordinate themes resulting from the analysis. Finally, consideration is given to the limitations of the study and suggestions for additional research.

Methodology

To further understanding of what influences an individual to undertake an activity it is helpful for us to explore how they make meaning of that experience and the wider context within which they operate. Regardless of whether and how organisations demand their managers to coach, it is how managers make sense of this that will inform their accounts of what their role of coach means to them and how they experience it.

The subjective nature of this demands a research approach that seeks to understand the experience of managers and considers that their actions have “a meaning for them and they act on the basis of the meaning that they attribute to their acts and to the acts of others” (Bryman, 2012, p. 30). The study therefore adopted an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach as this would facilitate a deeper exploration of how managers personally and directly experience their role as coach; recognise that individuals interpret and create their own reality; and enable the enquiry to travel beyond quantitative measures (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Research participants and data collection

Rather than trying to generalise human behaviour, the idiographic nature of IPA recognises the need to understand, in great detail, the specific accounts of how individuals experience something, whilst giving access and insight to a common perspective (Smith *et al.*, 2009). Consequently the study used a small, purposively selected sample which consisted of six sales managers from a variety of Global and UK based IT sales organisations. Each participant was responsible for coaching direct reports; had a minimum of 3 years managerial responsibility; and had received some form of formalised coach skills training. This enabled the enquiry to focus on individuals who worked within similar environments; shared similar challenges and characteristics; and for whom the research question would have relevance.

To collect the richness of data required for IPA, in-depth interviews were undertaken, each lasting approximately 90 minutes. As the enquiry was concerned with how managers experience their role of coach, in context of the meaning they make of that experience and how they interpret their world, it was essential the interview questions did not steer the discussion or infer any preconceptions that could influence responses. Consequently, semi structured interviews were used to help maintain focus, whilst allowing a flexible and open dialogue with non-directive, open ended questions (Willig, 2013). This allowed participants freedom within the discussion, allowing for the discovery of new insights, whilst helping to keep the conversation within the topic of managerial coaching.

Data analysis

IPA regards people “as sense-making creatures, and therefore the accounts which participants provide will reflect their attempts to make sense of their experience” (Smith *et al.*, 2009, p. 3). Data analysis requires the researcher to undertake a process of trying “to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them” (Smith *et al.*, 2009, p. 3).

This approach is not without its challenges. As a researcher, it is impossible to approach a study with a completely open mind. Our previous experiences will undoubtedly influence how we interpret something; where we choose to focus our interest; and how we make links between information. However, IPA acknowledges and embraces this link, where the pre-existing body of knowledge and opinion that we bring with us as researchers is viewed as a foundation of understanding on which to build, rather than a bias. As Willig notes (2013, p. 86) “it means that knowledge is only possible through the application of initial categories of meaning which the researcher then modifies through the process of interacting with the data”.

Nevertheless, a thorough and systematic process of reflection and continual reabsorption with the data is critical during data analysis, such that the interpretation remains loyal to the underlying meanings participants had conveyed. My previous experience as a manager, together with the experiences I encounter within my current consultancy practice, which is focussed on supporting and training managerial coaches, undoubtedly forms part of my pre-existing body of knowledge and opinion. Consequently data analysis guidelines as provided by Smith *et al.* (2009), together with a quality framework (Yardley, 2000), were adopted and applied so as to provide a robust framework of rigour and continual reflexivity, such that it promoted authenticity and validity to the study's findings.

Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed in isolation, followed by an initial process of notation, paying particular attention to the explicit meanings participants conveyed; similarities and differences in the content; and any apparent connections and contradictions. A more analytical stance was then adopted which allowed emerging themes to be identified, observing any interesting relationships and contradictions between and indeed within themes. Once each transcript had been analysed independently, all cases were compared and contrasted so as to identify common and opposing themes. Finally a process of abstraction was employed to help reveal connections between the themes, clustering them together where relationships appeared to exist. This resulted in the emergence of three superordinate themes:

1. The preference towards an informal, conversational style of managerial coaching
2. The impact created by the receptiveness of the individual which appears to be influenced by their awareness of the benefits of coaching, their openness to feedback and whether they feel safe
3. The effect a mind-set of empowerment and emotional maturity has on the manager's propensity to adopt a coaching approach.

Findings

The most significant aspect emerging from the study centred on the first theme and the preference for a conversational style of coaching. For the participants involved, they are coaching. In fact they are doing it on a daily basis, but not necessarily in a way that organisations are expecting or potentially measuring. Rather than follow a formalised and structured process, participants prefer to adopt a more conversational style to achieve the motivation and support they desire from their teams.

This offers an interesting perspective on whether the evident disparity reported in the research around managerial coaching presents an accurate picture, or whether a preference for a conversational approach results in managers' efforts going unnoticed. Given the implication this has on how managers are potentially recognised and measured around their coaching efforts, this paper focuses primarily on this element of the study's findings.

Context and purpose

Before exploring this theme, it is helpful for us to first consider the context of why participants felt they used coaching within their role. At the outset of the research, a definition of managerial coaching was intentionally avoided, so as to prevent any preconception influencing the interpretation of participants' experiences. However, the data appeared to indicate that for the participants the definition of leadership and managerial coaching begins to merge: "*You can't just separate it and say 'today I'm managing and tomorrow I'm coaching', to me it's one of the same...you know the way that you manage*".

For all the managers interviewed, their primary purpose for using coaching was to achieve growth

and success by motivating their people and it was also considered pivotal to their role. One participant encapsulated this when he explained that “*to embark on the journey without coaching is to sit on the start line of a Formula 1 race with three wheels and think you're going to get somewhere*”.

Whilst this resonates with existing research and practitioner texts, which advocate the use of coaching to help achieve organisational success (Ellinger, *et al.*, 2010; Whitmore, 2010; Zeus & Skiffington, 2000), there was also an added sense of persuasion in the language used by participants. One manager described how he asks “*the right questions to get them to think along the lines that I want them to think along*”.

This perhaps highlights a subtle difference in the potential outcome of managerial coaching, as opposed to coaching undertaken by an external coach for example, an issue Bresser (2011) emphasised as potentially contributing to the ambiguity of what managerial coaching means in organisations. Whereas coaching in the traditional sense aims to remain true to the goals and aspirations of the individual (Starr, 2008; Whitworth, Kimsey-House, & Scandahl, 2007), managers also need to maintain loyalty to, and be ever mindful of, the core objectives of the organisation.

Mintzberg (1990, p. 6) highlights this challenge, observing how managers “must motivate and encourage employees, somehow reconciling their individual needs with the goals of the organisation”. Whilst all participants emphasised the power of maintaining self-determination in the individual, the tension Mintzberg draws attention to could offer some explanation for the added sense of coercion in the participants’ narratives.

Preference towards operational, informal coaching

All of the participants described two distinct approaches when considering their application of coaching. Firstly the use of coaching in the operational context, addressing day to day challenges; and secondly in the context of personal development and longer term career progression. This contrast aligns with one made by Ives (2008) when he distinguished between a goal-oriented approach to coaching, which is typically shorter with fairly quick results; and a personal-development approach, which is typically longer and more profound. One manager explained:

There are different levels for me. I could be coaching at a fairly tactical level...helping that individual own the solution, coaching them to come to the right decision. But then if you go to the other end of the scale there's the more strategic coaching...you know... 'What are your aspirations in terms of your role?'

Participants also differentiated between daily conversations and formalised one-to-ones when describing how they undertook coaching. There was a consistent preference and higher propensity across all participants to adopt a more conversational stance, with an apparent reticence in undertaking a more structured and formalised approach that could be viewed as a defined coaching session. This appeared to further support the view that coaching was intrinsic to their role rather than a specific activity. One participant explained: “*I see the coaching as, how would I describe it? It becomes more innate, rather than we need to have a coaching session*”. Indeed, this would appear to support Evered & Selman’s (1989) suggestion that coaching should be viewed as a shift in management paradigm, rather than simply a technique.

This differentiation between a conversational approach and more formalised sessions also appeared to mirror the differences previously described around the use of coaching as either tactical or strategic. Participants described the majority of time being spent at the tactical level when using a conversational style on a daily basis and the more strategic, personal development conversations being undertaken in a more formal setting but on a less frequent basis. Returning to Ives, (2008, p. 100) he also highlights how the different approaches to coaching create “a different perspective [...]

on the role of the coach and on the objective of coaching” and this could go some way to explain the differences expressed by participants. In describing the balance, one manager explained *“I have a semi structured one-to-one every month or so where there’s a personal development output. But most of it is the conversational day to day...that deals with operational issues”*.

The formal one-to-ones were typically a prescribed coaching activity requested by the organisation and the participants all described a high level of discomfort and reticence in using a more formalised approach, highlighting their experiences of where this had worked against them, as the individual being coached became defensive and less likely to open up. One participant explained:

The more formal you make coaching, the more barriers there are to it succeeding...If you say we're going to meet for an hour's coaching, the first thing that person's going to think is 'what have I done wrong?'. It becomes confrontational...I've got an instant barrier to get over.

This apparent reticence to adhere to an organisation’s definition of formalised coaching also appeared to stem from the managers’ preference for a conversational approach. One participant highlighted *“To my mind, you know a business enforcing their version of coaching is more uncomfortable for me because I apply it more conversationally”*. Participants also described how it was important for them to have the latitude to apply coaching in a way which suited them personally, so it became a natural way of being:

I think coaching and your practical application of it is quite a personal thing... having it forced down by the company can be a little painful if your ideologies on coaching aren't lined up...you make it awkward for people to 'live' in it.

The awareness of the individual

The data also highlighted the issue of whether the individual knows they are being coached and how this influenced the manager in how they chose to approach coaching. When talking about demands placed on him by his organisation, one participant described how more formal and explicit coaching can be perceived as remedial or a form of micro-management:

There are things that can be improved but it's finding the way to do it, to work on it without saying 'I'm coaching you today'. But this place would rather you say it's a formal coaching session. I wouldn't feel comfortable doing it that way. It implies to me that there's something that needs to be fixed. They [the team] would feel that I was micro managing them to the extreme.

This issue of how an individual is aware of whether they are being coached came through consistently across all participants. One noted that *“People often don't realise that they're being coached”*. However, it was more evident in the context of formalised one-to-ones that individuals appeared consciously aware they were being coached. When coaching was undertaken conversationally this awareness was less evident. One participant described this difference:

Individuals are aware they're being coached in the formal sessions. But not conversationally, I don't think they realise it...When I ask them a question they're like 'oh that's a really good question, I hadn't thought of that' but I don't think they think they're being coached.

In many cases participants indicated an actual preference for when people are unaware they are being coached; further supporting the sentiment that coaching is an intrinsic part of their role. As one manager explained:

I think, for you to add value as a manager, coaching them in their situation should be an ongoing thing, whether they realise it or not...and nine times out of ten I don't think the reps realise they're being coached.

One specific contradiction to this was evident with one participant who explained “*I am very transparent...I even tell them I'm switching in to coaching mode.*” Interestingly, he also placed more significance on selling the benefits of coaching to his team than other participants, being very vocal about why he adopted the management style: “*I explain to them what I'm doing...I tell them exactly what the reasons are...it's so easy to do and makes total sense to me and the people I have to lead*”. This stood out as a unique stance against the other participants and perhaps hints towards the challenge of employees not really understanding the benefits of coaching, a point noted by Somers (2007, p. 276) when he observes that “coachees may misunderstand the need for change and see coaching as a remedial activity which they should not subscribe to”.

The lack of transparency and preference for more covert coaching, found within the majority of cases, contradicts much of what is published in practitioner texts (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2005; Hawkins & Smith, 2006) which indicate towards using formality and structure as a way to help reinforce and support a culture of coaching by providing clarity as to its purpose and consistency to the processes involved. However, experiences shared by most of the participants appear to reject these views. So without formality and structure, how do they develop a successful coaching approach?

Creating the right environment

A consistent theme which emerged from the experiences of all participants was the importance they placed on creating the right environment for their teams, both at an individual and team level. One participant explained: “*They can't feel like it's being 'done' to them. So for me it's all about creating that environment where they feel safe.*” Their comments echo the belief that creating the right environment is a central tenet for successful coaching (Kline, 2009; Peltier, 2010). This appeared to make it easier for the managers to then employ coaching techniques, without drawing attention to the fact. One of the participants illustrated this: “*Creating the environment in which you can coach is the real strength...then the coaching just becomes an open, comfortable, safe conversation between two people*”.

Developing a foundation of trust and respect also appeared to improve receptiveness to feedback and encouraged coaching based dialogues:

Respect them, enable and empower them...create that level of dialogue between you...all of that stuff helps me create an environment in which I can coach my team. The respect for people and the trust that you build means you can coach them because they can push back...they know they can push back.

This appeared to create a more relaxed and natural environment which contrasted with the defensiveness and confrontation many of the participants described with the formality of a more structured one-to-one. Indeed, the lack of willingness to engage appeared to increase even further when placed in a more formalised environment, with the situation creating a sense of caution in the individual. Once manager described this challenge:

I think you've got to try and put that person at ease. You know, they're going to feel intimidated [in a formal session] and you're not going to coach anyone who feels intimidated because humans are naturally defensive individuals, they will try and protect themselves if they can.

Conversely, when operating in a more informal and relaxed environment, the participants described their experiences far more positively. One manager explained:

I was really happy with that kind of conversation, because it was an open environment, it was honest, it was direct and he seemed to be a little bit more open to the feedback, hearing others thoughts.

Frustrations and formality

Despite their reticence to use a more formalised approach, yet another contrast emerged when participants spoke about moving to a more formal setting when they felt they were not making progress with an individual. This was particularly prevalent when they felt the individual was not being receptive and they described the need for the individual to “*take things more seriously*”, potentially indicating a desire to re-establish their authority through the use of more formal structure (Morand, 1995). One participant illustrated this rationale:

It just means that you're helping them understand that you're serious about wanting to have the change, because sometimes they're just like 'ok, whatever', whereas this makes it more formal, you're trying to say 'look, this is serious, this is really serious' I think you just need the formality of the environment.

In addition to the formal environment, the frustration participants experienced also appeared to elicit the use of a more autocratic and directive style, despite their recognition that this potentially had a negative impact on someone's level of engagement. One participant explained:

If someone says something to you in that confrontational, telling style you know the natural tendency is to close down. Lights are on, but no one's home. And if you've closed down then you're not listening, nothing's going to change.

This offered an interesting contradiction. The apparent reticence by the managers to use a more formalised approach, coupled with the adverse effect this appears to have on an individual's receptiveness, was then at odds with the tendency to shift to a more formalised and directive approach when the manager became frustrated and viewed the coaching as ineffective. Indeed, these contradictions may be highlighting a potential tension between how managers prefer to undertake managerial coaching and the reality when faced with an individual who does not understand or embrace the benefits of a coaching approach.

Discussion and Conclusion

The data offers a picture where managers are potentially experiencing a less open and effective dialogue when they adopt a more structured and formalised approach. Their experiences indicate a preference towards a more conversational style of coaching in a relaxed and safe environment, where employees are not typically aware they are being coached. The data suggests that, for them, coaching is simply a way in which they manage rather than a specific, formalised activity that is an adjunct to their primary role, an approach which is highlighted by Clutterbuck & Megginson (2005, p. 83) when they advocate managers use coaching “as a way of doing business in general, rather than just as a one-to-one development intervention”.

Indeed, for the large majority of participants they struggled to differentiate between when they were managing and when they were coaching, regarding the latter as an integral part of their role and critical for building high performing teams. However, when they were placed in a formal situation or coaching session they found this frequently had a negative impact on the openness of the individual being coached, rendering any coaching efforts more difficult and ultimately less effective.

What appeared more important was creating a trusting and respectful relationship and a relaxed environment where the individual felt safe. It would appear that when this is created coaching just happens and, in many cases, the individual is not even aware they are being coached. Rather than a prescribed activity, it would appear managers prefer their coaching efforts to simply be part of what they do.

As I had entered the research process having observed poor experiences of managerial coaching in practice and witnessed managers struggling to incorporate coaching into their management style, the discovery that participants were actively coaching on a daily basis was a somewhat surprising but encouraging finding. Research had suggested that in reality managers are not providing the coaching that organisations demand (CIPD, 2011; Clutterbuck, 2012; Gilley, *et al.*, 2010). Given data from this study contradicted with this, I revisited the research and would question whether this issue is potentially misrepresented due to the spectator and consumer roles of the participants involved in the respective studies. For example, the CIPD (2011) survey was largely targeted at people in HR, talent management or learning and development and the participants in Gilley *et al.*'s study (2010) were responding as employees receiving managerial coaching.

Whilst it is not my intention to discount the significant value these communities have to offer, data from this study suggests managers are potentially ignoring the demands introduced by their organisations, choosing instead to employ managerial coaching conversationally in a way they feel better suits them and their teams. Those receiving the coaching are not necessarily identifying the activity as coaching and consequently these endeavours are conceivably going unnoticed, distorting any efforts at measuring the frequency of management coaching.

This finding certainly supports the observation made by Anderson (2013) that the activity of managerial coaching is frequently concealed due to its implicit nature. This presents an interesting consideration for organisations actively trying to encourage managerial coaching. The preference towards a conversational approach supports the sentiment found in leadership theory (Bass, 1990; Evered & Selman, 1989; Hersey *et al.*, 2008) that coaching should be a way of managing, rather than a prescribed activity. Indeed Anderson *et al.* (2009, p. 5) suggests “the line manager role is better conceived in management style terms as a coaching style of management, integrated within a move from a ‘command and control’ to a more participative style of management”. Furthermore, providing employees with the knowledge and skills that allows them to embrace the benefits of managerial coaching could help increase the receptiveness of individuals. This would potentially lessen the tendency for managers to move to a more directive style when coaching efforts appear to be failing and support a more successful adoption of managerial coaching.

Organisations may therefore wish to revisit the expectations they are placing on their managers and allow a more flexible approach that enables managers to build it into their management style, rather than be constrained by an overly rigid and formalised process (Knights & Poppleton, 2008). By considering how they support their managers in creating a coaching culture, such that managerial coaching becomes a daily conversation – simply a way of doing business – a more appropriate measurement could be determined that would perhaps reveal that managerial coaching is actively happening, encouraging others to follow suit.

Limitations and additional research

The findings from this study have highlighted that for the participants involved, there is no decline or apparent discrepancy in their use of managerial coaching. Indeed they coach every day, but perhaps not in a way that organisations demand; and to some extent the formalised and structured way in which their organisations are expecting it to happen is actually making it more difficult for them. It is this aspect of the study which appears most significant and, given the importance organisations are continuing to place on managerial coaching, I would suggest this area could inform additional exploration and research.

In particular, it would be advantageous to expand our understanding of the continuum of coaching activities; whether the conversational approach is indeed more prevalent than perhaps current measurements are capturing; and whether this approach offers more successful outcomes than more prescribed and formal activities. Should this demonstrate that a conversational approach is indeed more effective, further research could be beneficial in understanding how best to equip managers with the skills to have powerful, informal coaching conversations rather than follow structured formal coaching processes; and how we can define a measurement approach that would more appropriately and accurately capture these activities.

Whilst the findings offer a valuable insight into how managers experience their role as coach, as the research only involved a small number of participants in a specific sector, it is not my intention that they should be generalised and this limitation of the methodology employed for the study is acknowledged. Consideration should also be given to the issue of non-response bias and its potential methodological limitation. It is acknowledged that of the individuals invited to become participants, those that voluntarily responded may have a more active interest in managerial coaching and a higher propensity to respond than someone who did not. Whilst their experiences remain valid and help us further our understanding of managerial coaching, the consequence of the non-response bias does mean that data omits the experiences of managers who perhaps do not coach as actively as those that did participate. Furthermore, IPA is underpinned by the interpretation not only of the researcher, but also the participant's ability to recount their experiences accurately so as to reveal their meaning. The process does not allow for the risk of events being adapted in order to fit with social acceptance or specific organisational norms and this limitation of the methodology should also be considered when interpreting the findings. However, these limitations are an integral part of IPA and it is trusted they have been addressed by applying a rigorous design to the research methodology, a continual process of personal reflexivity and a substantive and iterative approach to data analysis and interpretation, such that it brings authenticity and validity to the study's findings.

It is also important for the reader to draw on their experiences and consider how these resonate, or indeed, contrast with the interpretations made throughout the study. It is only by bringing these different perspectives together that we can truly further our understanding and it is for this reason that IPA offered the ideal research paradigm for the enquiry. Selden, Widdowson, & Brooker (2005, p. 51) encapsulate this perfectly when they draw on the views of Gadamer (1994), emphasising the importance our past has on our understanding of the present, stating that "understanding does not completely separate knower and object in the familiar fashion of empirical science; rather it views understanding as a 'fusion' of past and present".

When considered from this standpoint, my aspiration for this study was that it would help us further our understanding of managerial coaching through this constant evaluation, curiosity and consideration, such that we can create new knowledge concerning an area which has, and will continue to have, such significant impact on managers and the organisations within which they lead. What the study has achieved is a personal and idiographic analysis of the experiences of a small group of sales managers. Whilst this revealed a number of insights which are currently supported by the extant literature, it also proposes others which are only just starting to emerge as important factors and it is in this respect that the study offers value in highlighting some of the ambiguity found around managerial coaching that perhaps contributes to the apparent discrepancy being reported.

References

- Anderson, V. (2013). A trojan horse? The implications of managerial coaching for leadership theory. *Human Resource Development International*, Vol 16, No 3, 251-266.

- Anderson, V., Rayner, C., & Schyns, B. (2009). *Coaching At The Sharp End: The Role of Line Manager in Coaching at Work*. London: CIPD Publications.
- Bass, B. M. (1990). From transactional to transformational leadership: Learning to share the vision. *Organizational Dynamics*, 18(3), 19-31.
- Bond, C., & Seneque, M. (2013). Conceptualizing coaching as an approach to management and organizational development. *Journal of Management Development*, 32(1), 27-72.
- Bresser, F. (2011, July/August). Go Deeper: Where do Businesses Stand in the Design and Implementation of Coaching Programmes. *Coaching at Work*, Vol 6, Issue 4, pp. 45-47.
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social Research Methods, 4th Edition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- CIPD. (2011). *Learning and Talent Development, Annual Survey Report 2011*. Retrieved from [www.cipd.co.uk: http://www.cipd.co.uk/binaries/5455%20Learning%20and%20Talent%20Development%202011.pdf](http://www.cipd.co.uk/binaries/5455%20Learning%20and%20Talent%20Development%202011.pdf)
- CIPD. (2013). *Learning and Talent Development, Annual Survey Report*. Retrieved from [www.cipd.co.uk: http://www.cipd.co.uk/binaries/6174%20LTD%20WEB.pdf](http://www.cipd.co.uk/binaries/6174%20LTD%20WEB.pdf)
- Clutterbuck, D. (2012). *Why Line Manager Coaching Often Doesn't Work and What to do About it*. Retrieved from [www.gpstrategiesltd.com: http://www.gpstrategiesltd.com/downloads/Why-line-manager-coaching-often-doesn%27t-work-and-what-to-do-about-it-v1.0-April-2012%5B27%5D.pdf](http://www.gpstrategiesltd.com/downloads/Why-line-manager-coaching-often-doesn%27t-work-and-what-to-do-about-it-v1.0-April-2012%5B27%5D.pdf)
- Clutterbuck, D., & Megginson, D. (2005). *Making Coaching Work - Creating a Coaching Culture*. London: CIPD.
- David, O. A., & Matu, S. A. (2013). How to Tell if Managers are Good Coaches and How to Help Them Improve During Adversity? The Managerial Coaching Assessment System and the Rational Managerial Coaching Program. *Journal of Cognitive and Behavioral Psychotherapies*, Vol 13, No 2a, 497-522.
- Ellinger, A. D., Hamlin, R. G., & Beattie, R. S. (2008). Behavioural Indicators of Ineffective Managerial Coaching: A Cross National Study. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, Vol 32, No 4, 240-257.
- Ellinger, A., Beattie, R. S., & Hamlin, R. G. (2010). The 'Manager as Coach'. In E. Cox, T. Bachkikova, & D. Clutterbuck, *The Complete Handbook of Coaching* (pp. 257-270). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Evered, R. D., & Selman, J. C. (1989). Coaching and the Art of Management. *Organizational Dynamics*, 18(2), 16-32.
- Ferrar, P. (2006). *The Paradox of Manager as Coach: does being a manager inhibit effective coaching*. MA Dissertation, Oxford Brookes University.
- Gadamer, H.-G. (1994). *Heidegger's Ways*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Gilley, A., Gilley, J. W., & Kouider, E. (2010). Characteristics of Managerial Coaching. *Performance Improvement Quarterly*, Vol 23, No 1, 53-70.
- Grant, A. M. (2010). A Stages of Change Perspective on the Adoption of Workplace Coaching Skills. *Journal of Change Management*, Vol 10, No 1, 61-77.
- Grant, A. M., & Hartley, M. (2013). Developing the leader as coaching: insights, strategies and tips for embedding coaching skills in the workplace. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 6(2), 102-115.
- Hagen, M., & Aguilar, M. G. (2012). The Impact of Managerial Coaching on Learning Outcomes Within the Team Context: An Analysis. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, Vol 23, No 3, 363-388.

- Hamlin, R. G., Ellinger, A. D., & Beattie, R. S. (2006). Coaching at the heart of managerial effectiveness: A cross-cultural study of managerial behaviours . *Human Resource Development International*, Vol 9, No 3, 305-331.
- Hawkins, P., & Smith, N. (2006). *Coaching, Mentoring and Organizational Consultancy: Supervision and Development*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Hersey, P., Blanchard, K. H., & Johnson, D. (2008). *Management of Organizational Behaviour: Leading Human Resources*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.
- Heslin, P. A., Vandewalle, D., & Latham, G. P. (2006). Keen to Help? Managers' Implicit Person Theories and Their Subsequent Employee Coaching. *Personal Psychology*, Vol 59, No 4, 871-902.
- Hicks, R., & McCracken, J. (2010). Coaching as a leadership style. *Physician Executive*, Vol 37, No 5, 70-72.
- Hunt, J. M., & Weintraub, J. (2002). How coaching can enhance your brand as a manager. *Journal of Organizational Excellence*, Spring , 39-44.
- Hunt, J. M., & Weintraub, J. R. (2011). *The Coaching Manager, Developing Top Talent in Business* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- ILM. (2011). *Creating a Coaching Culture Survey*. London: Institute of Leadership & Management.
- Ives, Y. (2008). What is 'coaching?' An exploration of conflicting paradigms. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, 6(2), 100-113.
- Joo, B., Sushko, J. S., & McLean, G. N. (2012). Multiple faces of coaching: Manager-as-coach, executive coaching, and formal mentoring. *Organization Development Journal*, Vol 30, No 1, 19-38.
- Kline, N. (2009). *Time to Think*. London: Cassell Illustrated.
- Knights, A., & Poppleton, A. (2008). *Developing Coaching Capability in Organisations*. London: CIPD.
- Ladyshewsky, R. K. (2009). The manager as coach as a driver of organizational development. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, Vol 31, No 4 , 292-306.
- Lewin, K., Lippitt, R., & White, R. K. (1939). Patterns of aggressive behavior in experimentally created social climates. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol 10, No 2, 269-299.
- Manz, C. C., & Sims, H. P. (1987). Leading workers to lead themselves: The external leadership of self managing work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol 32, 106-128.
- Matthews, J. (2010). Can Line Managers Ever be Effective Coaches. *Business Leadership Review*, 7(2) 1-10.
- McGregor, D. M. (1989). The Human Side of Enterprise. In H. J. Leavitt, L. R. Pondy, & D. M. Boje, *Readings in Management Psychology*, 4th Edition (pp. 314-324). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mintzberg, H. (1990). The manager's job - folklore and fact. *Harvard Business Review*, March-April, 1-13.
- Misiukonis, T. (2011). The conclusions that middle managers draw from their beliefs about organisational coaching and their coaching practices. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, No 5, 54-69.
- Morand, D. A. (1995). The Role of Behavioral Formality and Informality in the Enactment of Bureaucratic Versus Organic Organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, 20(4), 831-872.
- O'Connor, J., & Lages, A. (2004). *Coaching with NLP - How to be a Master Coach*. London: Element.
- Peltier, B. (2010). *The Psychology of Executive Coaching*. New York: Routledge.

- Selden, R., Widdowson, P., & Brooker, P. (2005). *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (5th ed.). Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Methods and Research*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Somers, M. (2007). *Coaching at Work*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- Starr, J. (2008). *The Coaching Manual: The Definitive Guide to the Process, Principles and Skills of Personal Coaching*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.
- Tannenbaum, R., & Schmidt, W. H. (1973). How to choose a leadership pattern. *Harvard Business Review*, 51, 162-180.
- Whitmore, J. (2010). *Coaching for Performance* (4th ed.). London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.
- Whitworth, L., Kimsey-House, K., & Scandahl, P. (2007). *Co-Active Coaching*. Mountain View, CA: Davies-Black Publishing.
- Willig, C. (2013). *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3rd Edition*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Yardley, L. (2000). Dilemmas in qualitative health research. *Psychology & Health*, 15, 215-228.
- Zeus, P., & Skiffington, S. (2000). *The Complete Guide to Coaching at Work*. Sydney: McGraw Hill.

Angie Dixey is founding Director of *Angie Dixey Ltd*, a consultancy providing executive coaching and leadership development programmes to sales leaders and their teams: www.angiedixey.co.uk. Angie has an MA in Coaching & Mentoring Practice from Oxford Brookes University, together with 20 years of experience in direct and leadership sales positions.